STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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GOVERNOR

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North Carolina Board of Transportation
Environmental Planning and Policy Committee
Meeting Minutes for August 1, 2001

A meeting was held on August 1, 2001 at 8:00 AM in the Emergency Information Center in the Transportation Building. Nina Szlosberg chaired the meeting. Board of Transportation members that attended were:

Conrad Burrell	Paul Waff	Nina Szlosberg
Cam McRae	Lanny Wilson	
Margaret Klutz	Alan Thornburg	

Other attendees included:

Mark Brinson	Pat Ivey	Ken Pace
Roberto Canales	Berry Jenkins	Allen Pope
Craig Deal	Don Lee	Lubin Prevatt
Michelle Duval	Carl McCann	Len Sanderson
Janet D'Ignazio	Dale McKeel	David Schiller
Ed Eatmon	Ehren Meister	Roger Sheats
Bill Gilmore	Ashley Memory	Charles Tomlinson
C. A. Gardner	Jon Nance	Jim Trogdon

Ms. Szlosberg called the meeting to order at 8:03 am. After opening remarks, Ms. Szlosberg accepted a motion to approve the minutes from the July 11, 2001 Environmental Planning and Policy Committee meeting. The motion was accepted unanimously.

Ms. Szlosberg introduced the first guest presenter, Dr. Mark Brinson. Dr. Brinson is professor of biology at East Carolina University and is an expert on North Carolina wetland issues.

Dr. Brinson's opening summary was that all wetlands are not alike and the functions, forms, and values must be treated accordingly. Nationally, five percent of the landscape is classified as wetlands. In North Carolina, seventeen percent of the landscape is considered wetlands. The challenge we face is that wetlands are commonly being converted to other uses. However, North Carolina is doing a better than other states in protecting our wetlands.

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Wetland areas are located throughout the state, however, the majority are isolated in the coastal and tidewater regions. A good example of a good wetland area in North Carolina is the Tar River basin. If there were a major disruption in the land use of a wetland area like the Tar River, there would be a drastic alteration in the drainage density of the headwater, significantly effecting the ecological environment of that region. Therefore, the state needs better ways to accommodate for wetland land use change and restoration projects.

There are several different types of wetlands located within North Carolina. Examples include hardwood flats, pinewood flats, and saltwater marshes. All are important to the natural environment. The hardwood and pinewood flats must periodically be burned to sustain their richness and ecological role. Our saltwater marshes encounter a different difficulty. A saltwater marsh must maintain adequate amounts of water and to do so they rely on the tidewaters entering through the inlets of the outer banks. The inlets must be preserved and unaffected to allow adequate water intake.

Dr. Brinson concluded by elaborating that there is currently a national and statewide trend to promote and preserve our wetlands. A lot of different people and organizations are discussing the importance they have on our environment. Overall, our wetlands have three major functions that must not be neglected: their hydrological importance, their importance to the food web and habitat, and their importance to water quality.

Mr. Bill Gilmore, the Planning Development and Environmental Analysis Manager, and Mr. David Schiller, a Mitigation Tracking Specialist for Planning Development and Environmental Analysis, followed Dr. Brinson by presenting an overview of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Wetland and Stream Mitigation Program. Their presentation included a program overview, identification of the means and methods of impacts, and future challenges.

North Carolina wetlands originally covered over seven million acres statewide with a vast majority on the eastern sections of the state. Today, there are approximately 4,300,000 acres of wetlands statewide, a decrease of 39 percent. Every seven years there is an impact on 6000 acres of wetlands. Streams in North Carolina are difficult to measure. The estimation of stream distance is in the tens of thousands of miles. However, every seven years it's estimated that 200 miles of streams are being impacted. North Carolina is a national leader with respect to stream mitigation.

To begin the mitigation process, the potential mitigation sites have to be identified, which is outlined in the Natural Systems Technical Report and as part of the NEPA documentation. The actual primary site identification emerges utilizing GIS methods. After the sites are identified, the NCDOT will send biologists out into the field to conduct a fauna and flora inventory. Concluding a wetland and stream delineation, other agencies and the NCDOT will finalize the selection process of a mitigation site by completing an assessment of the proposed transportation project and the impacts that may occur. The NCDOT has two options in selecting the sites: on-site mitigation and off-site mitigation.

Mr. Schiller noted that the NCDOT has several mitigation methods, the In-house Program, NCDENR-WRP Program, and the Full Delivery Program. The In-house Program has numerous

steps, including locating the sites through consultants and the public, conducting feasibility studies, planning the mitigation project, designing the mitigation project, constructing the mitigation site, and finally monitoring the project for several concluding years. The In-house Program takes a lot of time, resources, and support to carry out.

The NCDENR-WRP Program was adopted through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Wetland Restoration Program (WRP) in 1999. The WRP provided all stream and wetland mitigation for the NCDOT in twelve catalog units. The cost varies depending on the project and site specifics. However, NCDOT has paid WRP approximately $20 million for the mitigation of 250 acres of wetlands and 70,000 feet of streams.

The Full Delivery Program is defined as a wetland or stream mitigation project that is planned, designed, constructed, and monitored by a private firm on property acquired by that firm and under contract to NCDOT. There is a procedure that is outlined for the structure of the program, and the NCDOT monitors the overall process of the Full Delivery Program. To date, there have been thirteen contracts executed amounting to 1,975 acres and at the total cost of $31,520,100.

Overall, the three mitigation programs have cost of about $250 million. Mr. Gilmore elaborated on the positive impact the department has had with mitigation. NCDOT will continue to use the In-house Program, expand and continue the NCDENR-WRP Program, and continue the Full Delivery Program with some revisions.

A question was asked by Board Member Waff on the restoration requirements. Mr. Gilmore addressed it by describing the ratio standards required with mitigation projects. There was brief discussion about the restoration requirements by agencies and the process that occurs and what direction it is heading. There were follow up comments by board members concerning stream impacts and bridging.

The committee asked a question concerning the planning procedures in mitigation. Ms. Janet D'Iganzio, the Chief Planning and Environmental Officer, addressed the question emphasizing the current process improvements being conducted and the importance of the mitigation workshop to be held in September. A brief discussion concerning the need for effective and thoughtful planning occurred among the committee members.

In concluding the meeting, Ms. Szlosberg introduced Ms. Pricey Harrison of the Coastal Resource Commission and Ms. Michelle Duval, of Environmental Defense. Both have had instrumental roles with environmental issues in North Carolina.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 5, 2001.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 am.

NS/em